

William Safire

Questions on three big stories: A missile, a scandal, a stolen secret

With the world's eyes fixed on the Catocin Mountain summit, questions go unasked about three of the biggest stories of the year:

1. *The escalation of the Communist drive to take over Africa.* A possibility exists that a surface-to-air missile brought down a Rhodesian airliner. If that

Pat Oliphant, whose cartoon usually appears on this page, is on vacation.

is true, who armed the terrorists headed by Joshua Nkomo with missiles?

When the Soviets tried to arm Cuba with missiles capable of hitting the U.S., we readily went to the brink of war. If it should turn out that the Soviets are supplying missiles to terrorists in Africa (and that is not yet proven) should we not at least stop trying to undermine the "internal settlement"? What would we do if Palestinian terrorists were supplied with missiles? Or Puerto Rican nationalists?

2. *The biggest money-stealing scandal in the history of the American government.* On July 26, after being shown evidence of widespread corruption, Jimmy Carter authorized the Justice Department to enter the investigation of the General Services Administration. On July 27, he authorized the firing of Robert T. Griffin, a Tip O'Neill crony who had been with the agency for 35 years and had been its acting head during the '76-'77 interregnum.

At the time, we were told the Griffin dismissal was

just a matter of bureaucratic incompatibility: Tip's man just couldn't get along with the new agency chief. But why should the president risk a major blowup with his much-needed House Speaker over a simple patronage matter?

What was the real reason for forcing Tip's man out? We have been assured that Mr. Griffin is a man of "high moral character and personal integrity"; if so, why was he not left in place to help ferret out the grafters in the agency he knew better than anybody?

If, on the other hand, Mr. Griffin was seen to be personally honest but likely to protect his old pals, or to drag a foot if the investigation reached congressmen who may have cut a few deals, then why was Tip's crony given a \$50,000 sinecure in the Carter White House? That's quite a place to put somebody you do not trust.

3. *The theft of vital national security information about our super-secret "Big Bird" satellite.* We have a dozen photographic reconnaissance satellites sensitive enough to read the license plates on the cars of Kremlin officials. This "Big Bird" is the best source of intelligence we have to verify Soviet SALT compliance.

Three weeks ago, a 23-year-old clerk named William Kampiles, who had worked for the CIA eight months last year, was arrested for stealing the manual of this ultra-secret satellite and selling it to the Soviets.

Inquiring senators have

been told that only three numbered copies of this document were at CIA headquarters. Stansfield Turner's ashen-faced aides have been fumbling for answers to questions like these:

How was it possible for a new, young clerk to be in possession of the most sensitive information we possess?

What kind of security system information does CIA have that permits a clerk to take home a document too large to fold? And what incredible laxity permits one of three copies of our closest-held manual to be missing for 10 months with nobody noticing?

What kind of intelligence show is Adm. Turner running that picks up signs that the Soviets were making significant changes in countering our "Big Bird" — without setting off alarms throughout the agency?

A profoundly experienced intelligence operative tells me that this may be "the most dangerous penetration of our intelligence since the Soviets put a man in the National Security Agency in the late '50s."

This concern goes deeper than the loss of one great secret and beyond the need to tighten security procedures. It rejects the notion that any young man can get himself hired by the CIA, be given immediate access to the most intimate secrets of a nation's arsenal, and be able to walk out one sunny day with the single secret that the Soviets want most.

The concern of intelligence professionals is that this episode may indicate

the presence of a Soviet "agent in place" high up in the CIA.

The possibility of an American Philby always draws great chuckles from our leaders; but put on the eyeglasses of the legendary Edward Jay Epstein or novelist Graham Greene and ask along with me:

Who at CIA recruited this young man? Who would know to what place to direct him, or his cut-out, for the manual? Who knew of previous Soviet espionage probes — at TRW a year ago, for example — aimed at this kind of reconnaissance information? Was this defector "burned" — deliberately turned in — to protect the agent in place?

This CIA might try to brush these questions off as fanciful, contending instead that the recent theft was the work of one man trying to make some money — but more than one senator of the Select Intelligence Committee is working on the assumption that our intelligence agency has been infiltrated.